Becoming oneself through trials: a framework for identity work research.

Stéphan PEZÉ

PhD student

Université Paris-Dauphine, DRM, France

Corresponding author: Stéphan PEZÉ, Université Paris-Dauphine, Place du Maréchal de Lattre de Tassigny, 75 775 Paris Cedex 16 (France), stephanpeze@yahoo.fr

Abstract

This paper aims to offer a new way to think and to study 'identity work' in relation with organizational identity regulation attempts and a deeper understanding of both the several facets of materiality of identity work and the agency/structure interplays in this process. The current growing body of studies about identity work is useful to understand *how* the self become. However, these studies encounter some limits, especially the lack of contextualization of individuals' identity work vis-à-vis broader cultural and social structures and their organizational 'diffraction' or the overemphasis on discourses at the expense of other identity resources, whereof material artefacts and embodied practices. To overcome these limits, this paper intends to offer a framework based on the concept of 'trials' designed by the French sociologist Danilo Martuccelli, which are 'historical challenges, socially produced, culturally represented, unequally distributed, that individuals must face' (Araujo and Martuccelli, 2010:8). I argue that when facing an identity trial, an organizational member measure himself and this can be a useful framework to think identity work and to overtake the limits underlined above. Methodological implications of this perspective – 'identity trials' as analytical lens to study identity work – are further discussed.

Keywords

Identity work, trials, identity regulation

In 2010 and 2011, the French army has launched a recruitment campaign based on the catch phrase: 'become yourself'.[1] This recruitment campaign is mainly based upon the promise of the achievement of a valuable and true identity through the embracement of a military career. This way of attracting people – through attempts to talk to their inner selves – raise several questions: How embracing a military career will lead people to 'become themselves'? What kind of 'identity work' would be triggered by the different steps of a military career? How major trials such as battles or internal 'rites of becoming' (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009) will influence this identity construction?

All these questions meet up with increasing scholars' attention around the construction of identity inside organizations (Alvesson, Aschcraft and Thomas, 2008; Thomas, 2009; Ybema, Keenoy, Oswick, Beverungen, Ellis and Sabelis, 2009). Indeed, even if organizations are not the only place of identity construction, they still are one of the central place supporting that process, also one where managerial attempts to shape individual's inner self are more and more salient (Knights and Willmott, 1989; Rose, 1989; Kunda, 1992; Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Identity – which is sometimes presented interchangeably as subjectivity or self or self-identity (Watson, 2008) – refers to the answer people give to the question: 'Who am I ?'. This notion is surrounded by debates such as the ontological status of identity or the place of organizational members' agency in the crafting of their own identities (Thomas, 2009). In this paper, I adopt a non-essentialist take on identity as something fluid and fragmented, reflexively understood by an individual. One of the promising trends developed over the past years is the concept of identity work. Indeed, this concept describes us *how* the self become (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). The aim of this identity work is to maintain a quite positive (Clarke, Brown and Hailey, 2009), coherent and distinctive sense of self. However, if identity work could be seen as a sort of day-to-day ongoing routine (Alvesson, et al., 2008:20), it is mainly triggered by specific events or experiences which produce a rupture in our sense of self or 'at least a minimal amount of self-doubt and self-openness, typically contingent upon a mix of psychological-existential worry and the scepticism or inconsistencies faced in encounters with others or with our images of them.' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002:626) This could be triggered for example by a work role transition (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010) or when one realizes that s/he is not the one s/he thought s/he was (Costas and Fleming, 2009). To cope with these events, 'people are continuously engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a precarious sense of coherence and distinctiveness.' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002:626) The underlying processes of this identity work are the production of a self-narrative which is based upon social identities fuelled by discourses and feed-back from others (Watson, 2008).

Whatever useful and meaningful, current studies about identity work bring forward several questions. (1) First of all, identity work has generally been studied in micro-individual contexts without taking into account broader social and historical contexts. It is odd because identity could be thought as a relevant articulation of structure and agency (Watson, 2009; Ybema, et al., 2009). Indeed, studies around identity could help us to understand how individuals are shaped by larger institutional and historical formations in which their organizational experiences are anchored. In doing so, we could 'avoid myopic pitfalls' (Alvesson, et al., 2008:12) and better understand the role of power in the crafting of identities. (2) Moreover, previous studies have given major attention to discourse as material for identity construction and identity work. However, most of those discursive identity studies 'do not account for the materiality which structures or maintains subject positions' (Spicer, 2007). There is a need to go beyond discursive formation and to expand our knowledge about 'resources or materials out of which identities are crafted' like 'embodied practices' or 'material and institutional arrangements' (Alvesson, et al., 2008:18-19). (3) Those two main limits are partially consequences of the research strategies developed to study identity work. Indeed, as an individual intrapersonal phenomenon, identity work is quite difficult to study. To date, scholars have been following two main research strategies to study self-doubt and the related identity work: they study (a) the specific identity work prompt by a destabilizing event (that I call 'bounded identity work') or (b) the general identity work which takes place either through broad discourses or various life events (that I call 'loose identity work'). Excepted for a few number of studies (e.g. Thornborrow and Brown, 2009; Brown and Lewis, Forthcoming), it appears that these strategies – even if adapted to study the very processes of identity work itself – complicate the analysis of the influence of organizational identity regulation

devices on identity construction, i.e. 'the more or less intentional effects of social practices upon processes of identity construction and reconstruction.' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002:625) Hence, on the one hand, 'bounded identity work' studies focused only on single situations which prompt identity work but which are either exceptional (e.g. workplace bullying in Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008) or too centred on a particular organizational experience (e.g. work role transition in Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010) to analyse the identity regulation exercised upon employee. On the other hand, 'loose identity work' studies analyze organizational members' identity work which takes place under the influence of so many discourses and events that it blurs the analysis of their respective role.

To overcome these limits, I suggest that we can usefully draw upon the concept of trials as developed by the French sociologist Danilo Martuccelli (2006; 2010). Following C. Wright Mills work about sociological imagination (1970), which relevance has been underlined for organization studies (Barrat, Forthcoming), Martuccelli links personal troubles, or trials, to broad historical and social structures. According to him, trials are 'historical challenges, socially produced, culturally represented, unequally distributed, that individuals must face.' (Araujo and Martuccelli, 2010:8) When s/he faces a trial, an individual measures her/himself and engages her/his sense of self. Basically, a trial is a test, a challenge through which individuals are confirming, infirming or reorienting their self-identity. In this view, trials engage identity work. For example, an exam is a trial related to broader collective stakes: school, education, etc. The success of failure to an exam such as the bachelor leads to different social situations. In both cases, it triggers a specific identity work around which someone is: a graduate with a quite open career path or a kind of loser who will develop an alternative valued identity thanks to other success (family, work, etc. which are other kind of trials).

I claim that the concept of trial could help us to advance identity work research in the following ways: (1) trials are the local expression of broader organizational and social collective stakes. By 'local expression', I mean the organizational 'diffraction' of these stakes, i.e. the expression of trials to an organizational level. To the extent that facing a trial means engaging in identity work, trials can help us to establish the relations between identity, agency and social structures; (2) to face a trial, individual mobilize various 'props' (organizational members' empirically ascertainable capabilities, e.g. time, money, help of others, personal diaries, etc.). The possibility to get these kind of resources – and the way they are effectively mobilized – help us to understand why some succeed and why other fail in facing same trials. Because they play a crucial role in success of failure when facing a trial, these resources have definitely an influence on individuals' identity work. Moreover, we can analyse identity regulation discourses and practices as some kind of props that individuals mobilize when facing a trial. As far as this mobilization occur through concrete work practices which aim is to respond to trials, we can also progress in the understanding of the discursive enactment and practices embodiment which occur during – and support – identity work; (3) to achieve these two promising propositions, trials also give us a new way of (a) conceptualizing and (b) investigating identity work. Firstly (a), I conceptualize identity work as a process which is triggered by very specific events – trials – and which is still an ongoing process because it is also the result of the confrontation of a sequence of repeated trials. As such, the contribution to current theory is that we can link specific events and broader life path and explain how identity work takes place in both of them. Moreover, trials allow us to compare individual's situations because they face same generic trials. Secondly (b), I argue that we need to reverse our research strategy, i.e. not looking for identity work *per se*. On the contrary, we could focus first on specific identity regulation devices and then look for the identity work they trigger or regulate. This move could be accomplished in looking for trials as analytical lens: the very specific situations which require the enactment of identity regulation devices and other identity materials through concrete work practices and identity work (e.g. the appropriation of organizational discourses in practice). In doing that, we adopt research strategy which give sense of the interplay between structure and agency and take into account a broad range of identity resources, including identity regulation ones.

The paper begins with a review of existing studies about identity work and their current main limits. It then focuses on developing the concept of trials. The three paths suggested above to answer these

main limits are then fully developed, articulated around trial as an analytical lens. The final section discusses the methodological implications of such a perspective.

On identity work

In this paper, I am 'interested in the open, situational and discursive sensitive nature of human subjectivity rather than depth psychological issues contingent upon early identifications.' (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003:1168) I intend to discuss with two recent streams developed in identity research: the critical and the interpretive ones (Alvesson, et al., 2008; Thomas, 2009). Accordingly to their ontological assumptions, identity is defined as a social construction fluid and ongoing rather than fixed and stable, not based upon a fundamental essence. However, identity is not completely unstable and uncertain. It rather could be seen as a 'crystallized self' (Tracy and Trethewey, 2005), i.e. offering several facets of self – even contradictory – depending on circumstances (Alvesson, et al., 2008). As Watson puts it: 'individuals may cultivate distinctly individualistic 'personas' to fit their personal and locational circumstances and preferences.' (2008:132) That is: 'identities may be stable without being coherent, and consist of core statements but not be unified' (Clarke, et al., 2009:314). However, we are constrained to use facets mainly coming from social identities available in our society. If these social identity categories are diffused by discourses (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Watson, 2008), there is no discourse powerful enough for shaping us totally. Rather, I also take seriously the idea of agency, 'the thinking subject possessive of intentional actions' (Thomas, 2009:169) without denying that we are constrained – and habilitated – by social identities which are available to us. Indeed, discourses have power effects but remain partially indeterminate so that they can't totally determine organizational members' identity (Bergström and Knights, 2006). Identity is co-produced through interaction between agency and discourses through a mix of conscious and unconscious process (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Brown and Lewis, Forthcoming).

During this process of identity construction – i.e. identity regulation and identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002) – organizational members do incorporate 'significant elements of external and socially available discursive notions of [some social identity]' (Watson, 2008:127) far more than they 'become' this or that specific social identity (e.g. managerial identity). It is more about to enrich and work on the pallet of available facets, even if this identity work is a struggle between several potential version of self (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Thus, this 'identity work' concept has been developed in order to better understand *how* the self become inside organization. As such, it is recognized as an 'important and emerging insight' (Watson, 2008:126). It is an individual based process, mainly cognitive, implying a dual self-work (*inward* and *outward*) in front of social identities or personas fuelled by discourses (Watson, 2008).
Inward processes refer to the production of a self-narrative (Clarke, et al., 2009), 'a narrative that makes a point about the narrator.' (Linde, 1993, quoted by Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010:135) This narrative is either a claim on one's identity and the very process of building this identity. Indeed, this narrative is based upon a repertoire: i.e. 'a register of terms and metaphors from which people draw selectively to characterize and evaluate actions and events' (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010:144). Such a repertoire is made of previously told stories, personal anecdotes (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010), cultural stereotypes, valid storytelling (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009), etc. Moreover, this inward type of identity work – as this repertoire – is fuelled by social identities embedded in various discourses (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Alvesson, et al., 2008). As I have underlined above, inside work organizations, these social identities, i.e. '*cultural, discursive or institutional notions of who or what any individual might be*' (Watson, 2008, original emphasis), are mostly the expression of power relationships and incentive to regulate organizational members' identities (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

The outward is the feed-back of other upon our identity claims, notably those of our self narrative (Beech, 2008). It acts as a form of 'self-verification' (Down and Reveley, 2009:380). An identity claim could be granted by other people, e.g. peers, managers or subordinates. If not, identity work

continue – for example in revising one's claims – until these claims are granted by significant others (DeRue and Ashford, 2010). The more a person obtain these grants, the more (s)he is able to accumulate social resources – i.e. 'the number, diversity, and quality of relationships that an individual has at work' – which facilitate further identity confirmations (Dutton, Roberts and Bednar, 2010:266). These two processes, inward and outward, are not exclusive or subordinate to each other. They are better seen as complementary, as an active dynamic between them (Clarke, et al., 2009). However, one process could take the lead on the other. For example, a manager exposed to several managerial discourses, which convey contradictory social identities, faces difficulties to produce a coherent self-narrative (inward identity work). He positions himself as a manager through an active engagement with his team members and other experts who he works with. In doing so, he mainly incorporates some managerial identity facets into his identity thanks to an outward identity work (Down and Reveley, 2009).

Finally, those inward and outward processes take the form of multiple stratagems (Down and Reveley, 2009), tactics (Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep, 2006) or customization practices (Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann, 2006). Basically, there are three main types of identity work: remedial, confirming or remedial. The first one, *liminal* identity work (Beech, 2011) is about an identity change. For example, an individual could try to go back to a prior identity which acts as an anchor to minimize the self-doubts coming from a new situation, like a status loss (Thomas and Linstead, 2002). S/he also could try new provisional selves – even if it is only to make fun of it (Ibarra and Petriglieri, 2010) – in order to change his/her identity. This liminal kind of identity work allows people to adopt a more attractive identity (Simpson and Carroll, 2008; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). This identity change can be more or less strong (Beech, 2008). Sometimes, when of our sense of self is highly destabilized, we must engage in a second kind of identity work: the *remedial* one, i.e. the struggle of organizational members to maintain or to reconstitute their threatened self-identity (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). But identity work is not always about change, it also comes from the embracement of organizational routines (Brown and Lewis, Forthcoming) and constitute along time a third kind of identity work, a *confirming* one.

Identity work should normally stop when an identity is secured and enables an self-investment in organizing practice without too much self-doubt (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), for example when a previous identity is confirmed. However, sometimes, this identity work failed and lead to a fragmented self, for example after a workplace bullying experience, when the 'self-identity was splintered to a degree that felt irreparable' (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008:112). Besides, it seems that '[i]n complex, ever-changing organizations people are engaged constantly in identity work as they deal with moral challenges and the existential worries that accompany them' (Clarke, et al., 2009:346). It is a never ending process which could be enhanced each time self-doubt is increasing. Finally, if I mainly refer as 'the way that individuals construe themselves in their work domain' (Dutton, et al., 2010:266), I acknowledge that work is not the only – even not necessarily the most important – site of identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Organizational members can also build on external and personal discourses and images to fuel their identity work (Thomas and Linstead, 2002).

Three challenges for identity work studies

Through a literature review and some personal reflections on this concept, have delimited three challenges for identity work concept: (1) the lack of contextualization of individual identity work or of its relationships with broader social structures; (2) the overemphasis on discourses at the expense of other identity materials, including embedded work practices; and (3) the problematic polarization of identity work research strategies which limit our opportunities when it comes to study identity regulation devices (i.e. organizational discourses and practices such as training or promotion procedures).

(1) It is generally acknowledged to separate self-identity on the one hand and social identities on the other hand. Identity work show us that those two analytical categories are linked: self-identity is influenced by social identities (a) fuelled by discourses and (b) conveys through our interactions with

others. However, much of current research remain close to organizational discourses and interactions without seeing the major structural influences that contribute to shape – but not totally determine – them. This closure is partially the consequence of survey instrument (Alvesson, et al., 2008). It is also the consequence of an internal debate in the identity literature. We find studies that celebrate human agency and the strong ability of organizational members to shape themselves as well as we find studies of muscular discourses that totally constrain individuals to a limited of normative identity (Thomas, 2009; Alvesson, 2010). If we acknowledge a claim such as: '[t]he broader historical, cultural, institutional and political influences that inevitably shape local dilemmas and responses thus fade from sight' (Alvesson, et al., 2008:11), it is important to underline that these broader social and cultural influences cannot be considered stronger enough to shape precisely and equally every organizational context. Additionally, inside organizations, studies about identity work equally show that agency play a critical role in identity construction, without denying that this process is nevertheless constrained by organizational discourses and interactions (Bergström and Knights, 2006). This constrain could be characterized as quite loose since discourses are somehow antagonistic and fragmented (Clarke, et al., 2009) and never strong enough to suppress human agency. They can even habilitate organizational members to find a sense of self in a micro emancipation way (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). However, this process is more subtle than a control/resistance dichotomy (Brown and Lewis, Forthcoming). Thus, identity could be seen as 'a 'permanent dialectic' between the self and social structure' (Ybema, et al., 2009:300).

The danger of this 'myopic pitfalls' is to individualize or to excessively psychologise identity work or to study it as an only 'internal' aspect of identity (Watson, 2008). Indeed, if one feels self-doubt about himself, about her/his managerial or technical capabilities, is it because s/he unable to fit the organizational expectations or because those expectations are partially abusive? How do we interrogate power effects of identity regulation organizational devices? Moreover, to what extent these power effects come from higher social and cultural distinguishing figures and are expressed in other organizations? We need more research which are able to produce insights about these 'processes of negotiation between social actors and institutions' (Ybema, et al., 2009:303).

(2) Most studies bring into focus a discursively shaped identity, in which discourses means broadly 'the structured collections of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing (as well as a wide variety of visual representations and cultural artefacts) that bring … objects into being' (Grant et al. 2004:3, quote in Thornborrow and Brown, 2009:361) Discourses, as far as they convey social identities, (Watson, 2008), strongly contribute to feed identity work in defining ourselves directly, defining ourselves by defining other, providing group categorization and affiliation, etc. (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). However, this overemphasis on discourse have been criticized, notably because it downplay the role of other kind of resources in identity construction: 'studies of subjectivity […] do not account for the materiality which structures or maintains subject positions' (Spicer, 2007). To date, several studies have pointed out the use of such resources but not in a systematical manner. For example, the role played by office decor in the defence of a threatened identity (Elsbach, 2003) or the use of artefacts such as dress, insignia, valued equipment and specific vocabulary to sustain a specific elitist soldier identity's embodiment (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). We still need a systematic understand of the role played by such material resources in identity work.

Moreover, apart from the possession and the use of material or symbolic artefacts (such as specific words), other scholars have called for an investigation of the 'embodied practices' which are implicated in identity formation (Alvesson, et al., 2008), i.e. what people really do at work. Several studies about identity work has well defined the various discourses circulating inside organizations and how organizational members were enacting them mainly through the crafting of a self-narrative and interactions with others (e.g. Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). We can say that crafting of a self-narrative using social identities fuelled by discourses is a form of 'narrative enactment' of discourses. Considering this 'interaction enactment' of discourses, studies have predominantly been conducted in a goffmanesque perspective: the presentation of the self in face-to-face encounters that act as a 'self-verification' process based on others' feed-back (Down and Reveley, 2009). But they mainly do it through a kind of impression management or management of

one's own image onto organizational 'social relationships' (i.e. dressing, speeches, behaviours, etc.). This kind of enactment is then fairly disconnected to the work people perform. Only few studies have come to study a kind of enactment of social identity through day-to-day work practice (e.g. Brown and Lewis, Forthcoming). This seems however especially relevant. Moreover, in a recent study about the identity work of lawyers, Brown and Lewis show that agency is exercised through performative routines. These real work practices constitute the opportunity of various appropriation of disciplined ostensive routine and then support their sense of quasi-autonomous and self-reflexive workers. Here, the day-to-day routines are a key stone for identity work (Brown and Lewis, Forthcoming).

The call for study of Alvesson and Willmott (2002:628) remains useful: 'There is a need for something in between, showing the diverse ways in which identity regulation is enacted'. I argue that further research will benefit from taking both into account (a) the use of diverse type of material to embodied identity and make identity claim, such as artefact (dress, office decor, etc.) and (b) the day-to-day work practices which inform this identity work through the enactment (or not) of the social identities – and other resources – promoted by identity regulation devices.

(3) Finally, as an individual intrapersonal phenomenon – even if related to broader social trends – identity work is quite difficult to study. To date, scholars have been following two main strategies to catch self-doubt and the related identity work: (a) looking for organizational members who lived very specific and commonly destabilizing situations as work role transitions (Ibarra and Barbulescu, 2010) or bullying workplace experiences (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008), mainly through interviews. This first methodological option leads us to focus on organizational members who are temporarily in clear and well identified situations and engage in what I call 'bounded identity work' since it is related to a specific situation and a specific kind of identity interrogations. On the opposite, (b) researchers have looked for a more general self-questioning of organizational members triggered by broad discourses, sometimes contradictory – e.g. managerial discourses (Thomas and Linstead, 2002; Clarke, et al., 2009) – or by a work-life experience related to an occupation, which required rich and in depth interviews mixed with participant observation (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003; Down and Reveley, 2009) or alternative empirical material such as autobiography (e.g. of a manager, Watson, 2009) or autoethnography (e.g. of an academic, Learmonth and Humphreys, Forthcoming). This second methodological option leads us to focus on few individuals who are eager to talk about their self-questioning. Besides, individuals vary from relatively passive to extremely active in this matter, depending on their life circumstances (Watson, 2009). However, this identity work is broad and diffuse in terms of time and situations and experiences encountered. That is why I call it 'loose identity work'. To sum up, to date, researchers mainly study identity work either triggered by some particularly destabilizing events or conversely by large organizational discourses. If these two research strategies are really interesting to study various nuanced identity work processes, questions could be raised about their ability to analyse their relationship to broader organizational phenomenons.

As I mentioned above, inside organizations, identity work is not emerging from nowhere. It is partially triggered by identity regulation, i.e. 'the more or less intentional effects of social practices upon processes of identity construction and reconstruction' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002:625). However, the study of 'bounded identity work' leads potentially to very specific and narrow identity regulation devices. It could occult any attempt to study how power relationships are deployed at a broader organizational level. For example, where exactly are identity regulation discourses and practices involved when self-doubt and identity work occur because of a status loss? (as for one of the managers studied by Thomas and Linstead, 2002) A too narrowed approach could mask broader power effects and contribute to maintain the current blur around relationships between identity, agency and social structures. It moreover failed to capture the ongoing dimension of identity work. On the other hand, the study of 'loose identity work' leads to two risks: (a) being submerged by potentially relevant data or (b) being confined to the study of discourses without being able to finely studying their interplay with work practices. It renders difficult any attempt to analyse identity regulation devices because it excessively complicates its modelization and completeness. For example, it is difficult to delimitate which is relevant and not as identity regulation device when identity work is thought to be triggered by major events such as 'mergers, downsizing and increase commercialization' (Beech, 2011:297). At the

notable exception of few studies (e.g. Thornborrow and Brown, 2009 who analyze a specific military 'rite of becoming'), studying identity work in relationship with an identity regulation device is also a question of balanced analytic scale or analytical lens: being not too far and not too close of identity regulation devices while keeping in touch with individuals' experiences and work practices.

The concept of trials

There is room for studies designed for a largest analysis of identity materials – not only discourses – and contexts – not only the micro-focus of the immediate individual environments. In order to overtake these limits, I argue for the relevance of the concept of trials developed by the French sociologist Danilo Martuccelli (2006). Following C. Wright Mills's notion of personal troubles (1970), Martuccelli defines trials as 'historical challenges, socially produced, culturally represented, unequally distributed, that individuals must face.' (Araujo and Martuccelli, 2010:8). The idea is basically that trials are test through which we engage our sense of self – and in identity work. One first illustration of this can be found in the study of Leonard Hilton's autobiography. Watson (2009) outlines that the identity work of Leonard is mainly undertaken by through several events such as predicaments, conflicts, trials and challenges. His analysis, also inspired by C. Wright Mills' works, confirms that trials are opportunities for identity work.

The trial concept

For Martuccelli (2010), trials mean a specific kind of subjective experience. Trials are not every painful or difficult life events. They are not always lived as such by individuals. To be recognized as such, trials must have four specific characteristics: a trial is (1) the consequence of broader historical and social collective stakes, (2) it could be described as a litmus test narrative (e.g. a rite of passage) which implies a tension between at least two opposite principles, (3) it sustains a specific claim about social actors (individuals try to overcome trials and take the measure of themselves through them), (4) it acts as a social assessment (you could win or lose) which depends on the mobilization of props.

(1) Trials as diffracted event from broader historical and social collective stakes. A trial is always regarding a specific society. But a trial is not directly manufactured by institutions or specific structural mechanisms. In a specific society at a specific time, different forces which are more or less active and institutionalized give birth to some *generic* trials, a kind of trial which is diffracted at individuals' level through many ways. Formal organizations boundaries are not always the inevitable limit of our research objects. That is why Martuccelli calls for 'making individual experiences an interpretative key of a overall vision of society' (2010:155)[2]. The idea is that trials – identified at the individual level – could help us to better understand the collective stakes in play in a single society at a specific time. However, the generic trials that individuals have to face come from those contextual linked stakes. To sum up, trials are shared and particularly meaningful challenges for individuals living in a given society at a specific time (Martuccelli and de Singly, 2009).

(2) A trial implies a specific narrative. However, the narrative structure is not necessarily a three step structure – separation, liminality and aggregation (Van Gennep, 1960). According to Martuccelli (2010), trials are now mainly 'reversible', i.e. you never lose definitely a trial because this trial will be encountered several times in your life – giving new opportunities to confront them. However, all trials do not have the same reversible's degree (e.g. some school exam can be taken only twice). The point is that we are lead to face a sequence of equivalent trials which repeat themselves all lifelong. Moreover, a trial is better understood through ambivalence. More than a passage from a step to another, a trial is the situation where several contradictory principles are simultaneously valid (Martuccelli, 2006). Basically, a generic trial could be seen as the type of trial which is encounter several times by individuals through many various life circumstances. The generic trial is characterized by a tension between two generic principles (as noted above, this generic trial, as the principles which are in tension, are always the product of a specific society at a specific time). For example, Martuccelli (2006) defines work as a major trial of our existence. The generic two principles in tension in this trial are (a) the will to self-actualization through work and (b) the difficulties to be fairly recognized and

reward. This generic trial is diffracted in various and repeated work performance appraisals. It is the way that individuals deal with the tension between these two principles which defines the trial narrative.

(3) In Martuccelli's framework, an individual is an actor with three main characteristics. First, (a) individuals can always act in a different way. This first characteristic refers to a specific king of agency. Individuals are not totally free to do whatever they want but they are not totally constrained by social structures. In sum, social structures constrains but also enables individuals to act with a certain margin of action: 'contemporary societies are machines which format trials, however they don't determine individuals' conducts.' (Martuccelli, 2010:156)[3]; (b) an individual confront her/himself to a trial rather than building the world or producing symbolic interpretations; and (c) an individual experiences the trial through the great deal of effort s/he delivers when facing the trial: 'Whether it's understanding a text or a artwork, to confront an event or a situation difficult, in any case, a trial involves a radical transformation or at least a strong involvement of the self. The trial is inseparable from one's suffer.' (Martuccelli, 2010:115)[4]

(4) Trials are social assessment circumstances. However, this assessment is not necessarily formal. When an individual encounter a trial, s/he face it and try to succeed in – but s/he can lose. Facing a trial implies a success or a failure. However, according to Martuccelli, this success or failure is mainly a subjective appreciation depending on life paths and specific individual circumstances. Moreover, a generic trial is encounter several times through various forms – it is always possible to win or erase a previous failure, notably thanks to a learning effect. It also means that there is not a major penalty but a sequence of contradictory and sometimes overlapping trials' results. Finally, individuals are not equally 'equipped' to face trials. Their success or failure mainly depends on 'props' they get. Martuccelli has empirically indentified four props types: (a) infrastructure, generally the range of social rights given to a citizen by the law, including civil service, (b) resources, specially the amount of money one can use for its own benefits, (c) aids, a kind of resource only reachable through relationship and the decision of other to provide help (or not), and (d) supports, like family or personal diary, which assist individual in a more discrete manner to overcome trials difficulties. 'Thanks to resources, helps or supports, individuals are able to manufacture situations to seek to, without significant change in their structural position, enjoy diverse social environments.' (Martuccelli, 2006:401)[5]. Props are unequally distributed. Some enjoy situations of props' abundance whether other strive to sustain their limited resources.

To sum up, all these characteristics are represented in Figure 1.

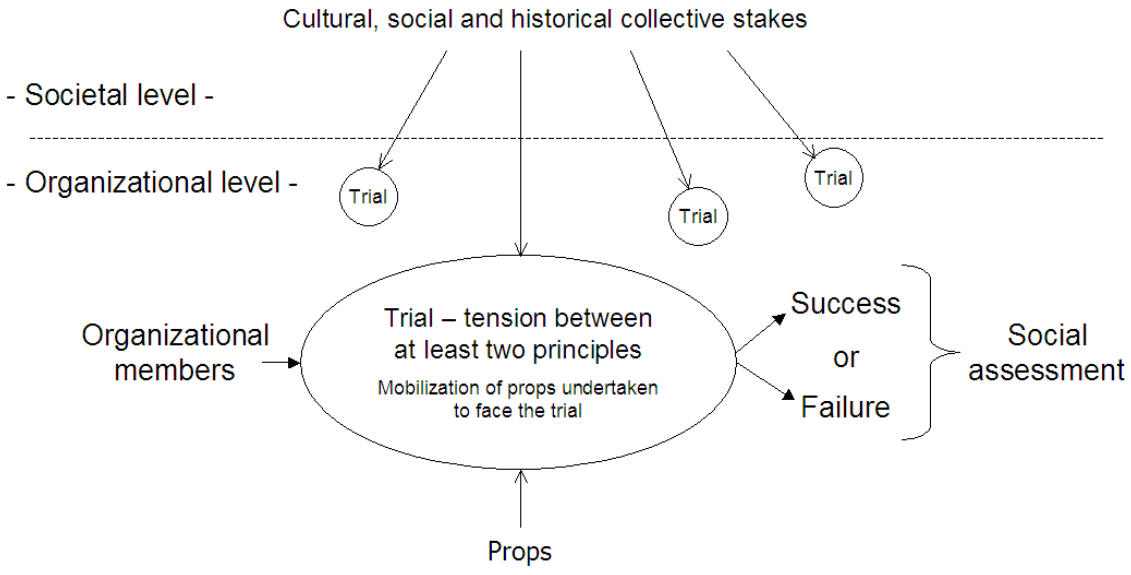

Figure 1: the trial concept according to Martuccelli (2006; 2010)

Trials and trials…

For the past 30 years, French sociologists have developed various works involving the concept of trials (Latour, 1988; Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Boltanski and Chiapello, 2007). For example, Latour (1988) has developed the concept of 'trials of strength' which implies the confrontation (moments of pure strength) of individuals mobilizing resources to win (and redefining social positions). One example of such a trial in an organization could be for a manager to give a talk which will influence on the rest of her/his career depending on her/his performance (Bourguignon and Chiapello, 2005:673). However, this kind of trial only implies a confrontation of individuals. Martuccelli's notion is broader since it addresses trials which are a confrontation of at least two principles in tension. This expands the range of potential trials. The 'trial of greatness' (or 'trial of merit') concept developed by Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) is another interesting kind of trial. According to them, a trial allows us to resolve dispute on the value of two or more individuals which are compared thanks to equivalence conventions.

This concept is developed further by Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) in their book about the new spirit of capitalism. According to them, trials are social arrangements institutionalized which aim is to test and to classify people. Social goods can then be distributed regarding this ranking. One organizational major trial of that kind is employee performance assessment (Bourguignon and Chiapello, 2005:671). However, this second kind of trial – of merit or institutionalized – is only concerned with formal trial which produce formal social selection. Once again, Martuccelli's framework allow us to consider a boarder spectrum of trial, including informal trials or trials which lead to more informal social selection. Boltanski and Chiapello's concept is nevertheless interesting because it pays attention to the trial's dynamic – including questions about a trial's legitimacy and the role of critique in trial's evolution and transformation. This adds some interesting insight to Martuccelli's view on trials which are also scalable – because they are the diffraction of major social, historical and cultural stakes. Indeed, it allows us to think about individuals' critical claims against trials or their rules as another way to express their agency. This usefully completes Martuccelli's view on how individuals agency is expressed through the way they meet and face trials thanks to the mobilization of various props.

Trials and identity work

A major claim of this paper is that trials are interesting opportunities to trigger identity work. Indeed, a trial is always an occasion of testing oneself and give birth to a more or less formal social assessment (Martuccelli, 2006; 2010). Then, in facing a trial, individuals take the measure of themselves. They not only think about the way to succeed in facing a trial. It engages the entire person, not only the cognitive part. They can win or lose and be strongly influenced by their trials true-life. For example, Martuccelli identify school as one of our broader main trials. Failing to pass an exam can lead someone to see her/him in a very different way than if s/he has succeeded in. Moreover, if s/he could achieve a success latter on, her/his self definition will also be influenced by the amount of work – and previous failures – s/he has to go through. In this case, self-doubt about 'who one is' and 'what one is able of' is pervasive – i.e. a strong self-doubt experience. However, identity work is an ongoing process mainly triggered by some special event which prompts self-doubt. According to the fact that 'the more testing and challenging identity work is accomplished when our sense of self is threatened or socially invalidated or destabilized' (Ybema, et al., 2009:312), we can establish a link between a trial and identity work: as they put pressure on our sense of self, trials are identity work opportunities. To this vantage point of view, *trials are specific situations which trigger identity work* (and so influence identity construction).

This identity work is undertaken both during the trial and after the trial's end. First of all, facing a trial is a situation where an individual – say an organizational member – have to arbitrate between at least two opposite principles. However, these principles convey different kind of social identities. For example, when writing an essay, a student can choose between originality – which conveys the valued social identity of a 'freethinker', or the risk to be thought as a 'maverick' – or safety – which conveys the more consensual social identity of a 'docile student', which could be found less attractive. It is a

form of identity *struggle* (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) which engage several questions: what to do? What will be the consequences of this action? Who am I in doing this? It can be think as a *liminal* identity work (Beech, 2011) since the identity of an organizational member is about to change (moving from a previous to a future identity) or to be confirmed or destabilized. Secondly, at the end of a trial, there is a 'judgment' regarding the success or failure of the organizational member who faced the trial. This judgment is made by the organizational member her/himself. But it could also be made by others: her/his colleagues, teammates, manager, etc. This judgment step also implies an identity work: organizational members (and others people) reflect on who they are regarding what they have accomplished. It can refine previous identity and be a more or less *confirming* identity work. It can also destabilize their sense of self and so trigger a more or less intense *remedial* identity work (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008).

To sum up, a trial is a specific event which prompts several kind of identity work. During the trial, an organizational member needs to balance between at least two opposite principles. This struggle lead her/his to choose between different solutions which conveys different meanings about who s/he is or could be (a liminal identity work which is inward – or outward if this organizational member asks colleagues about her/his doubts, which is also the mobilization of a prop). Moreover, when the trial is over, s/he assesses whether s/he succeed in facing the trial – partially upon other's feedback. This assessment is also an identity work (which could also be either an inward or outward identity work). Indeed, it is the moment where the organizational members become aware of her/his identity resulting from the trial's confrontation. Although, this identity can more or less destabilize her/his sense of self. The result of this assessment lead to a more or less confirming identity work or to the beginning of a remedial identity work (Cf. Figure 2).

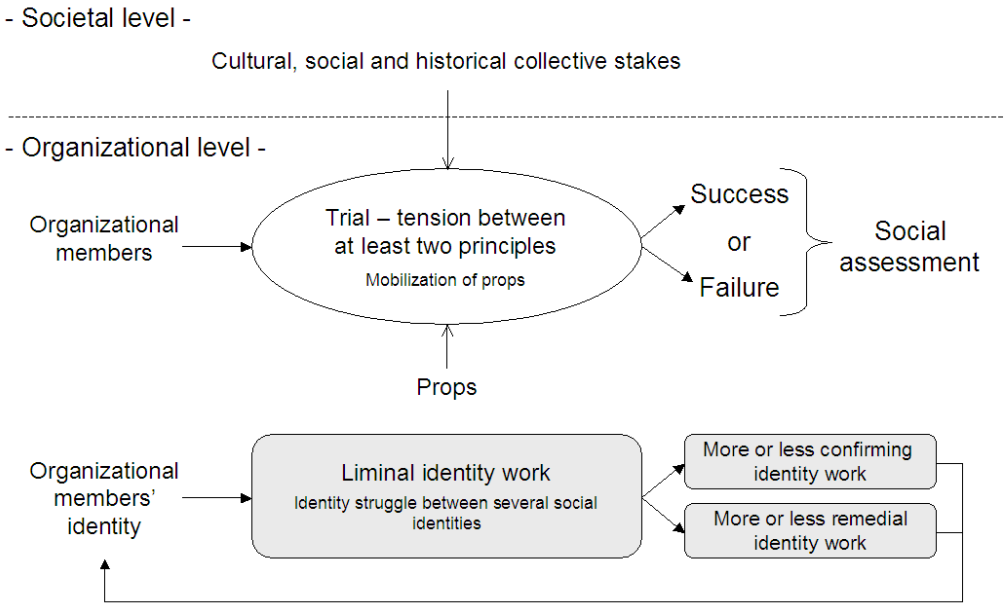

Figure 2: identity work undertaken through a trial

Moreover, trials are supposed to be repeated across time. Organizational members are facing several time the same kind of trials – so there is a learning effect (Martuccelli, 2006). Through these multiples confrontations, identity work continues. But to a certain point, as far as they do not evolve radically, trials could no longer be as hard as they have been experienced – due to this learning effect. So we can also study this trials' sequence and also its effects on identity work and identity (Cf. Figure 3).

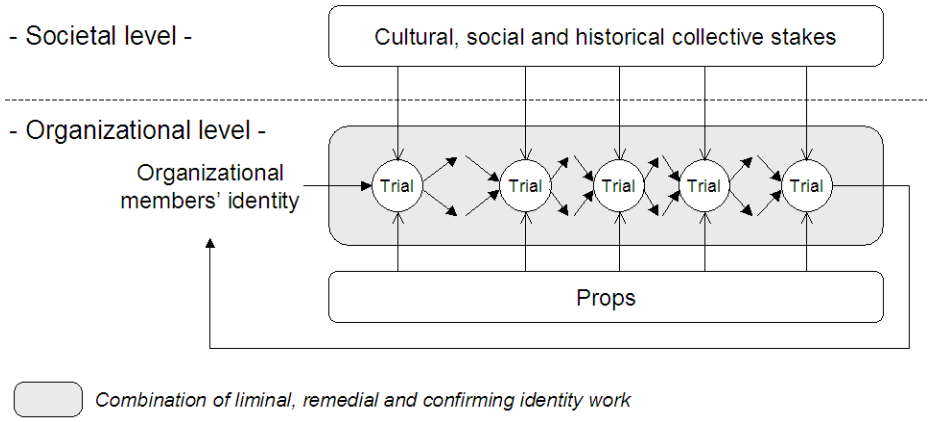

Figure 3: identity work undertaken through a sequence of trials

Discussion

As we will see below, the concept of trials can help us to overcome the three main limits underlined earlier about identity work literature. Moreover, it appears to be a useful concept to reconsider identity work which also gives paths to study identity work differently.

Trials, identity, structure and agency

Current identity work studies do not really take into account the relation between identity, structure and agency. It complicates the study of organizational power effects of identity regulation devices and overemphasizes identity work as an individual internal phenomenon. Trials can usefully help us to overcome this limit: (a) trials which trigger identity work are linked to structure and identity regulation devices and (b) make room for agency. Indeed, '[t]he notion of trial proposes an articulation between societal processes and personal experiences.' (Araujo and Martuccelli, 2010)

First of all (a), a trial is a special and located event whose existence depends of broader social and historical social trends. For example, in the article of Beech (2011:297), two organizational members engage in identity work because of 'triggering events related to structural and cultural changes in the organizations' which are 'mergers, downsizing and increased commercialization'. At the organizational level, trials which trigger identity work come from – i.e. are the diffraction of – broader societal processes which affect a majority of organizations. Moreover, to face a trial, organisational members should mobilize various props. Identity regulation devices – discourses and practices which potentially influence identity – are part of these props. Indeed, these 'discursive practices concerned with identity definition' (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002:627) are often embedded in broader procedures and talk about what organizational members should do and how to do it – they involve an image of who they are/should be. In studying these devices as props, we could look how they are mobilized when organizational members are facing trials and study their influence on both the trial encounter and the identity work related. This is a way to conceptualize how identity regulation devices influence – constrain and enable – identity work.

Secondly (b), however, props are not equally distributed – partially because some are more personal and do not directly depend of organization (e.g. education level, help possibilities, etc.) or depend on the hierarchal level. Moreover, organizational members do not mobilize them the same way. It explains why two individuals can address differently a same kind of trial. One can win as the other one can lose. Organizational members do not enact organizational discourses in the same way when it comes to face a trial. It is where agency takes place. This view is highly coherent with current insights of the identity work study conducted by Brown and Lewis (Forthcoming). Indeed, according to them, Lawyers' agency – and identity work – is exerted through the engagement in practice of organizational routines discourses. Moreover, this engagement is problematic and characterized by agonism, a

relationship of struggle and incitation between several principles – which is also a major characteristic of trials: tension between at least two principles. Trials give us a way to answer the call for studies in which 'identity formation involves processes of negotiation between social actors and institutions, between self and others, between inside and outside, between past and present.' (Ybema, et al., 2009:303) In doing so, we can contribute 'to expose to critical scrutiny how power operates to construct and stabilize identities in organizational contexts, themselves located within particular configurations of culture and history' (Thomas, 2009:170). Trials concept can help us to think critically about (a) the kind of trial – and opportunities for identity work – an organization is producing for organizational members and (b) the kind of props an organization offer and impose – and the identity resources embedded inside – in order to facilitate or constrain the resolution of these trials.

Trials, props, identity resources and embodied practices

Several authors argue that we miss an understanding of other resources than discourses to understand identity work, including (a) material artefacts and (b) embodied work practices (Spicer, 2007; Alvesson, et al., 2008). We can find both of them when looking at individuals facing trials.

Firstly (a), as explained above, facing a trial involve the mobilization of various props. Moreover, these props can convey identity resources, i.e. social identities. Discourses are well established as vehicles for social identities that feed identity work (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Alvesson, et al., 2008; Clarke, et al., 2009). However, these props are not only discourses. For example, in their study of a rite of becoming – the integration of an elitist soldier group which could be seen as a trial – Thornborrow and Brown underline 'the award of distinctive items of dress, insignia and equipment highly valued by the men, and the learning of a specialist vocabulary, which reinforced understandings that paratrooper identities had continuously to be worked on' (2009:366). Another example can be found in Pratt et al. study where 'physical artefacts—especially white uniform pants—were important for distinguishing first-year surgical residents from all other interns and in constructing their professional identity' (2006:248). All of these material artefacts convey social identities. These are identity claims about who one is or isn't. In this sense, the identity resources that are social identities are embedded in what we wear, use, possess or say[6]. That is, social identities are claimed by organizational members in various ways. This is coherent with previous studies about the *outward* mechanisms of identity work (claiming some social identities to others and revising it contingent on their feed-back) which are complementary with *inward* mechanisms (building a self narrative using social identities available in various discourses) (Down and Reveley, 2009). When facing a trial, an organizational member mobilizes various props which potentially convey such social identities. Identifying props and their embedded identity resources is a first step to better understand the role of material resources in identity work. The second step is located in the way organizational members mobilize effectively those props – thus those identity resources.

Secondly (b), social identities are also embodied in our work practices. Indeed, the technicians studied by Orr in his famous book 'Talking About Machines' are seen to build their professional identities more on their improvisation practices than on the managerial task prescribed (e.g. applying the manual's procedures) or than corporate discourses – which are however two kind of props conveying social identities (Contu and Willmott, 2006). What we do tell us – and others – who we are and aren't. It is also true for what we can't do. For example, one of the organizational members studied by Costas and Fleming, Paul, is buying critical books which convey here a specific social identity: being an intellectual interested in counter-culture (in contrast with a more 'corporate' identity). However, the fact that Paul had not the time to read them – books and reviews remain in 'their mocking plastic wrappers' (p. 371) – triggered the consciousness that he was no longer who he thought he was (2009).

To face a trial, one need to mobilize various props through work practices. Indeed, no one can face and succeed a trial – e.g. reaching ones annual sell goals – in doing 'nothing'. Many work practices are involved – phone calls and appointment scheduling, showing the products and negotiation, signing contracts and writing reporting, etc. Through work practices, the way props – and their embedded

identity resources – are mobilized help to confront a trial and participate in the linked identity work (a good salesman, a tough bargainer, etc.). Facing a trial implies practices that are meaningful for identity construction.

Here, we need to consider the 'ostensive' practices one the one hand and the 'performative' practices on the other hand (Latour, 1986). Indeed, ostensive practices are practices in principle, written on a procedure. This is what people *must* do. The ostensive practices convey the social identities defined as relevant for the organization, notably when organizational members are facing a trial. The performative practices are the practices really performed by organizational members. This is what people *really* do, notably during trials, with at least a minimum of improvisation. The performative practices also convey social identities. These social identities can differ from the ostensive practices ones. Indeed, they are the outcomes of organizational members' identity work through practices. Ostensive practices social identities are here considered as the media of this performative practices based identity work.

To sum up, the various props mobilized during a trial – and the way they are mobilized (or not) – can give us insights about the mobilization of their embedded identity resources, i.e. social identities conveyed by artefacts and through ostensive and performative practices. Studying the props mobilized during a trial gives us way to understand (a) how discourses and their related social identities are enacted but also (b) how identity resources are embodied into work practices. We can now improve our conceptual framework (Cf. Figure 4).

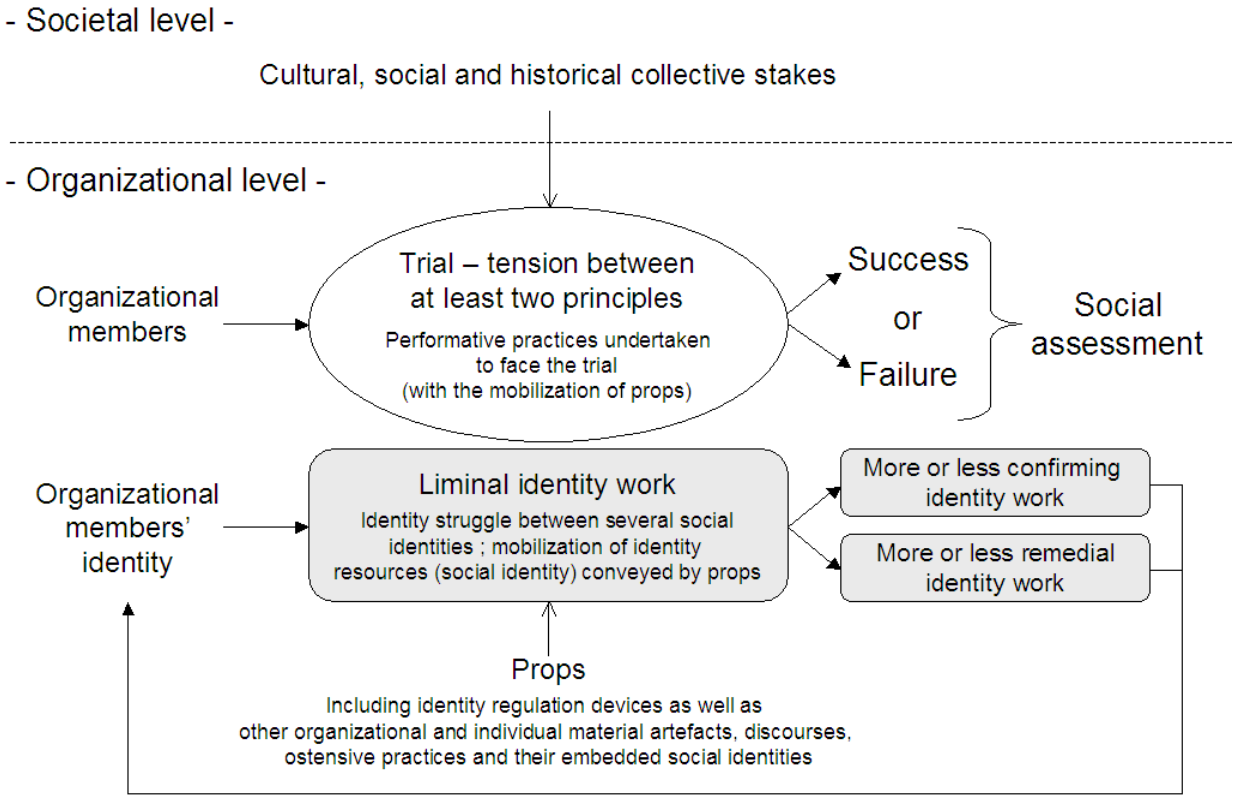

Figure 4: synthesis of the identity work undertaken through an identity trial

Identity work through trial: a new framework and a new research strategy

In the theoretical framework before-mentioned, trials act as an analytical lens to study identity construction. Indeed, trials' framework gives us a new way of investigating identity work and how identity is influenced by identity regulation devices. To achieve this, one of the possible research strategies is to focus first on specific identity regulation devices and then look for the identity work that they trigger or regulate. This could be accomplished in looking for trials as analytical lens: *the*

very specific situations which require the enactment of the identity regulation device studied and other identity resources through concrete work practices and identity work. If we look at the identity work undertaken during one particular trial, we could study what I called above a 'bounded identity work' event. But the main difference with previous research is that this event is not choose because it triggers identity work, but because it is both extremely meaningful and an opportunity for identity work. Moreover, in studying a trials' sequence, we engaged in a sort of 'loose identity work' study. However, we are not 'lost in discourses and relevant data' because we can focus on a sequence of specific major events. Trials' framework opens the path for a useful way to study to identity work.

I have shown how this trial is not any kind of painful event but a specific expression of broader social, historical and cultural stakes. There are some principle to follow in order to study identity work and the influence of identity regulation devices on organizational members' identity with the concept of trials. It concerns the identification of a relevant trial and of the props mobilized. To achieve this, one must follow several principles. The first one is to identity trial through an empirical inquiry rather than defining it a priori. Trials are not all kind of painful experiences either that they are always explicitly known as such by individuals. Following Martuccelli (2006:13), scholars must work at two distinct levels: (1) individuals' narratives of trials, i.e. 'discourses seemingly incommensurable and heterogeneous' and (2) analytically defined trials, identified by researchers inside individuals' narratives but never blended with them (i.e. building the generic trial). Moreover, a trial must be characterized by a core tension between at least two principles (the fundamental ambivalence of trials).

The second principle concern the number of different generic trial studied. 'In order to remain operational, the study must be limited to consideration of a limited number of processes that are particularly relevant in view of a historical and social concrete reality.' (Martuccelli, 2005:308). In one of his book, Martuccelli identifies eight main trials that French contemporary individuals must face (2006). But the trials studied are some sort of broader trials. Indeed, the organizational life is summarized in one main trial: work. However, we could go deeper in this broad trial and identify some specific trials encountered by organizational members. For example, Barrère focus her analysis on teachers who start their occupational life. She identifies four main trials which describes the challenges and tensions experienced by new teachers and their link with broader social dynamics (Barrère, 2005).

Then, two choices can be made: studying one kind of generic organizational trial or studying a standardized system of generic organizational trials. In order to explore the influence and power effects of identity regulation devices on identity and identity work, I suggest to choose the first option and to proceed as follow: (a) defining an identity regulation device mainly through the framework provided by Alvesson and Willmott, for example 'induction, training and promotion procedures [that] are developed in ways that have implications for the shaping and direction of identity' (2002:625) and (b) identifying the potential trials which are involved in relationship with this identity regulation device.

One of the advantages of this perspective is that everyone in the same social position is seen to experience the same kind of generic trial. Inside an organization, it is easy to select the specific people which face a similar identity regulation device, e.g. managers or salesmen. Then, the identification of the relevant trial experienced by this category of organizational members can be investigated through interviews which first aim is to discover what are the main difficulties, painful event or challenging tasks encountered in the implementation of the identity regulation device. After a first set of interviews, the researcher can build several generic trials that are potentially relevant in regard to the identity regulation device studied. The next step can involve several ways of data gathering. One interesting option is to realize more interviews with the organizational members concerned with the identity regulation device studied. Several interviews can be made with each of them. The aim of this second set of interview is to focus on the trials encountered by organizational members and to gather detailed narrative about the way they have tried to confront them. Questions will attempt to identify the different props mobilized by organizational members and the way they have mobilized them. A specific attention is required concerning the props implied in the identity regulation device. They also

need to focus on the perception of organizational members regarding their success or failure. Finally, when the narratives collected do not bring new data, the researcher can stop her/his data gathering. Then data analysis can focus on the identity narrative crafted by organizational members and the identity claims which are made or conveyed through the use or various props and their work practices. The main idea remains to understand the role of the social identities fuelled by regulation device and other props on the identity of organizational members in order to contribute to understand 'how power operates to construct and stabilize identities in organizational contexts, themselves located within particular configurations of culture and history' (Thomas, 2009:170).

Conclusions

This paper makes two contributions to current studies about identity work. First, it offers a new framework to conceptualize identity work which allows us to overcome current limits in the literature. Secondly, it draws upon this framework (i.e. using trials as an analytical lens) to offer an original research strategy to study identity work and power exercised upon identity. However, if the relevance of the trials' concept is well established here, we need empirical studies to highlight and complete this promising path. Indeed, further studies could deepen our understanding of the mobilization of props and their related social identities during the liminal identity work undertaken to overcome the trial. Moreover, an empirical study of a sequence of trials could help us to refine the framework offered here, notably in underlying the learning effect developed by organizational members and its relations with identity work. It will also be interesting to better comprehend the relations between the failure and success assessment in front of a trial and the remedial/confirming identity work it triggers. Finally, numerous kinds of identity regulation devices can be studied. Leadership programs, performance assessment, mentoring, recruitment and development programs, day-to-day work procedures, etc. A set of specific studies, as well as studies of different identity regulation devices based on the framework developed in this paper could help us to understand whether organizations are producing 'appropriate individuals' and whether organizational members can engage in micro-emancipation regarding their own sense of self (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Moreover, through the mobilization of the trial concept, those studies should show how these identity regulation devices are linked to trials and to broader cultural and social stakes and trends. This will be very valuable insights to deepen our understanding of identity as a negotiation between actors and broader social structures (Ybema, et al., 2009).

References

Alvesson, Mats (2010). Self-doubters, strugglers, storytellers, surfers and others: Images of self-identity in organization studies. *Human Relations*, 63 (2), 193-217.

Alvesson, Mats, Karen Lee Aschcraft and Robyn Thomas (2008). Identity Matters: Reflections on the Construction of Identity Scholarship in Organization Studies. *Organization*, 15 (1), 5-28.

Alvesson, Mats and Hugh Willmott (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control : producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studies*, 39 (5), 619-644.

Araujo, Kathya and Danilo Martuccelli (2010). Individuation and the work of individuals. *Educação e Pesquisa*, 36 (April), 77-91.

Barrat, Edward (Forthcoming). Re-Reading C. Wright Mills. *Organization*,

Barrère, Anne (2005). Les épreuves subjectives du travail à l'école In Caradec, V. and D. Martuccelli (Eds.), *Matériaux pour une sociologie de l'individu. Perspectives et débats*. Villeneuve d'Ascq: Les presses universitaires du Septentrion, 277-293.

Beech, Nic (2008). On the Nature of Dialogic Identity Work. *Organization*, 15 (1), 51-74.

Beech, Nic (2011). Liminality and the practices of identity reconstruction. *Human Relations*, 64 (2), 285-302.

Bergström, Ola and David Knights (2006). Organizational discourse and subjectivity: Subjectification during processes of recruitment. *Human Relations*, 59 (3), 351-377.

Boltanski, Luc and Eve Chiapello (2007). *The new spirit of capitalism*. London: Verso Books.

Boltanski, Luc and Laurent Thévenot (2006). *On Justification: Economies of Worth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Bourguignon, Annick and Eve Chiapello (2005). The role of criticism in the dynamics of performance evaluation systems. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 16 (2005), 665-700.
Brown, Andrew D. and Michael A. Lewis (Forthcoming). Identities, Discipline and Routines. *Organization Studies*,
Clarke, Caroline A., Andrew D. Brown and Veronica Hope Hailey (2009). Working identities? Antagonistic discursive resources and managerial identity. *Human Relations*, 62 (3), 323-352.
Contu, Alessia and Hugh Willmott (2006). Studying Practice: Situating Talking About Machines. *Organization Studies*, 27 (12), 1769-1782.
Costas, Jana and Peter Fleming (2009). Beyond dis-identification: A discursive approach to self-alienation in contemporary organizations. *Human Relations*, 62 (3), 353-378.
Derue, D. Scott and Susan J. Ashford (2010). Who Will Lead and Who Will Follow? A Social Process of Leadership Identity Construction in Organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 35 (4), 627-647.
Down, Simon and James Reveley (2009). Between narration and interaction: Situating first-line supervisor identity work. *Human Relations*, 62 (3), 379-401.
Dutton, Jane E., Laura Morgan Roberts and Jeffrey Bednar (2010). Pathways for Positive Identity Construction at Work: Four Types of Positive Identity and the Building of Social Resources. *Academy of Management Review*, 35 (2), 265-293.
Elsbach, Kimberly D. (2003). Relating Physical Environment to Self-Categorizations: Identity Threat and Affirmation in a Non-Territorial Office Space. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 48 (4), 622-654.
Ibarra, Herminia and Roxana Barbulescu (2010). Identity as Narrative: Prevalence, Effectiveness, and Consequences of Narratives Identity Work in Macro Work Role Transitions. *Academy of Management Review*, 35 (1), 135-154.
Ibarra, Herminia and Jennifer L. Petriglieri (2010). Identity work and play. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 23 (1), 10-25.
Knights, David and Hugh Willmott (1989). Power and Subjectivity at Work: From Degradation to Subjugation in Social Relations. *Sociology*, 23 (4), 535-558.
Kreiner, Glen E., Elaine C. Hollensbe and Mathew L. Sheep (2006). Where is the "Me" Among the "We"? Identity Work and the Search for Optimal Balance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49 (5), 1031-1057.
Kunda, Gideon (1992). *Engineering Culture. Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
Latour, Bruno (1986). The powers of association In John, L. (Eds.), *Power, Action and Belief: a New Sociology of Knowledge?* London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 264-280.
Latour, Bruno (1988). *The Pasteurization of France*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Learmonth, Mark and Michael Humphreys (Forthcoming). Autoethnography and academic identity: glimpsing business school doppelgängers. *Organization*,
Lutgen-Sandvik, Pamela (2008). Intensive Remedial Identity Work: Responses to Workplace Bullying Trauma and Stigmatization. *Organization*, 15 (1), 97-119.
Martuccelli, Danilo (2005). Pour une sociologie de l'individuation In Caradec, V. and D. Martuccelli (Eds.), *Matériaux pour une sociologie de l'individu*. Villeneuve d'Ascq: Les presses universitaires du Septentrion, 295-315.
Martuccelli, Danilo (2006). *Forgé par l'épreuve*. Paris: Armand Colin.
Martuccelli, Danilo (2010). *La société singulariste*. Paris: Armand Colin.
Martuccelli, Danilo and François De Singly (2009). *Les sociologies de l'individu*. Paris: Armand Colin.
Pratt, Michael G., Kevin W. Rockmann and Jeffrey B. Kaufmann (2006). Constructing Professional Identity: the Role of Work and Identity Learning Cycles in the Customization of Identity Among Medical Residents. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49 (2), 235-262.
Rose, Nikolas (1989). *Governing the Soul. The Shaping of the Private Self*. London: Free Association Books.
Simpson, Barbara and Brigid Carroll (2008). Re-viewing 'Role' in Processes of Identity Construction. *Organization*, 15 (1), 29-50.

Spicer, Andre (2007). Subjectivity In Bailey, J. R. and S. R. Clegg (Eds.), *International Encyclopaedia of Organization Studies*. London: Sage,
Sveningsson, Stefan and Mats Alvesson (2003). Managing managerial identities: Organizational fragmentation, discourse and identity struggle. *Human Relations*, 56 (10), 1163-1193.
Thomas, Robyn (2009). Critical Management Studies on Identity : Mapping the Terrain In Alvesson, M., T. Bridgman and H. Willmott (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Critical Management Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 166-185.
Thomas, Robyn and Alison Linstead (2002). Losing the Plot? Middle Managers and Identity. *Organization*, 9 (1), 71-93.
Thornborrow, Thomas and Andrew D. Brown (2009). 'Being Regimented': Aspiration, Discipline and Identity Work in the British Parachute Regiment. *Organization Studies*, 30 (4), 355-376.
Tracy, Sarah J. and Angela Trethewey (2005). Fracturing the Real-Self↔Fake-Self Dichotomy: Moving Toward "Crystallized" Organizational Discourses and Identities. *Communication Theory*, 15 (2), 168-195.
Van Gennep, Arnold (1960). *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
Watson, Tony J. (2008). Managing Identity: Identity Work, Personal Predicaments and Structural Circumstances. *Organization*, 15 (1), 121-143.
Watson, Tony J. (2009). Narrative, life story and manager identity: A case study in autobiographical identity work. *Human Relations*, 62 (3), 425-452.
Wright Mills, Charles (1970). *The Sociological Imagination*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
Ybema, Sierk, Tom Keenoy, Cliff Oswick, Armin Beverungen, Nick Ellis and Ida Sabelis (2009). Articulating identities. *Human Relations*, 62 (3), 299-322.

[1] Translated from French by the author, the original French sentence is 'devenez vous-même', http://www.devenezvous-meme.com/ (consulted on may 2011, the 16th).
[2] Quote translated from French by the author.
[3] Quote translated from French by the author.
[4] Quote translated from French by the author.
[5] Quote translated from French by the author.
[6] However, a prop does not convey a static and single defined identity resource. For example, wearing a fair trade T-shirt can imply several different social identities, depending on who look at this T-shirt and the specific situation: an engaged consumer, an utopian dreamer, a fashion victim, a responsible citizen and so on.